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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 000456

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/31/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV KWBG IS SETTLEMENTS ISRAELI PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS GOI INTERNAL

SUBJECT: HEBRON SETTLERS LEAVE VOLUNTARILY, REACH
COMPROMISE WITH IDF

REF: A. TEL AVIV 000296

1B. TEL AVIV 000389

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Gene A. Cretz for reasons 1.4 (b)
) and (d)

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cable.

11. (U) According to press reports, settlers left the Hebron market "voluntarily" on the night of January 30 in exchange for a deal made with the GOI that they would be permitted to return legally at a later date. They have until Thursday, February 2, to clear out their belongings. Brigadier General Yair Golan, IDF commander in the West Bank, reportedly agreed with the settlers that if they left voluntarily, the IDF would speed up a legal examination of the possibility of expropriating the land from the municipality and leasing it to the settlers at a future date. Per refs A and B, this would entail removing the Palestinian shop-keepers' protected status, thus resulting in their legal rights to the buildings. (Note: The Palestinian shop-keepers' were evicted by the IDF in 1994. End note.) Some settlers were quoted in the press saying, "We have an agreement in our hands. We intend to honor it and we expect and are certain that the other side (GOI) will also honor it."

12. (U) Attorney General Menachem Mazuz immediately denied that a promise was given to the settlers that they would be able to live in the Hebron market again. He admitted, however, that in the State's response to the High Court, the GOI will examine the possibility "of leasing the stores to Jewish settlers subject to the approval of the attorney general, on condition that the stores are not leased to the squatters," i.e., the current settlers in the market.

13. (C) Comment: The only distinction between the settlers' and Mazuz's statements appears to be that the State does not intend to let the original settlers return to the Hebron market. It seems clear, however, that the GOI plans to at least study the issue of expropriating the land, and possibly begin legal proceedings in the near future. Econoff asked Boaz Karni, treasurer of the Economic Cooperation Foundation, whether this meant that settlers -- the squatters or others -- may eventually return to the market, even if the legal battle is protracted. He responded, "I'm afraid you are right."

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JONES